

Schoodic General Management Plan News



BACKGROUND: What's Been Happening

Acadia National Park includes 2,266 acres on the Schoodic Peninsula, approximately 45 miles north of Bar Harbor, Maine. The Schoodic unit receives far fewer visitors than does Mount Desert Island despite its appealing scenery and opportunities for quiet enjoyment. Visitor amenities include a 5.5 mile scenic drive along the coast, the Frazer Point picnic area, foot trails and a gravel road to Schoodic Head, the highest point on the peninsula which offers panoramic views of the region, and Schoodic Point, a popular destination at the southernmost end of the peninsula for experiencing the ever-changing waters of Frenchman Bay from a rough red granite shore laced with veins of volcanic basalt.

Since 1935 the peninsula has also been home to the United States Navy, where a radio station was constructed to replace a similar facility on Mount Desert Island that stood in the way of

construction of the Park Loop Road. Surrounded by park land, the Navy base formally known as Naval Security Group Activity, Winter Harbor (NSGA), is located on 97 acres at Schoodic Point that once were part of Acadia National Park. It now comprises some 50 buildings and structures totaling 178,000 square feet, including dormitories, galley, townhouse apartments, offices, medical clinic, fire station, commissary, gymnasium, day care center, maintenance facility, campground, warehouse and related utility systems. The original Navy apartment and operations building and its generator house have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Called the Rockefeller Building, this two-story complex designed by Grosvenor Atterbury was named in honor of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. who was instrumental in the land exchange that established the Navy base at Schoodic.

When the Navy announced its intention to close the base at Schoodic by June of 2002, the National Park Service

(NPS) began planning to receive property that by law would revert back to the NPS. NSGA Commander Edwin F. Williamson and his staff are working hard to ensure a smooth transition by sharing information and coordinating efforts with the NPS and neighboring communities.

Further legislation has been introduced by Senators Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe and Representatives John Baldacci and Thomas Allen to clarify that the entire 97 acres will be transferred directly back to the NPS at no cost, and also to address other issues related to the closure and transition to civilian use. The base closure also involves 23 acres in Winter Harbor containing 80 units of housing and 451 acres in Gouldsboro that contain two operations buildings surrounded by a critical ecological area. These properties will not come to NPS; planning for their reuse is underway by the respective towns.

A public meeting was held in July 2000 to hear suggestions for future uses of the Schoodic unit. Response cards were distributed at the meeting and at

locations around the park and a substantial number were mailed back to the planning team. This was supplemented by a user survey conducted on the peninsula in 2001 where over 600 respondents were interviewed in depth about their current activities and preferences for Schoodic. In addition, the planning team has consulted with elected officials of Gouldsboro and Winter Harbor and has participated in other public forums.

This fall the planning team is conducting a formal scoping process and public meeting, as part of its compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) which requires federal agencies to consider options and evaluate their environmental impacts before making decisions. A draft plan and environmental impact statement (EIS) will be ready for distribution in the spring of 2002. The final plan will be prepared after review and comment on the draft plan, which will be available for a 60-day public review period.

A NEW PLAN FOR SCHOODIC

The 1992 Acadia General Management Plan states that the National Park Service will manage its lands on the Schoodic peninsula to retain opportunities for low-density recreation with the intent of retaining current use levels and the existing naturalness and solitude of this part of the park. Schoodic and its nearby offshore islands are zoned as natural areas, managed primarily for conservation and resource protection with limited facilities such as trails and signs permitted. This plan assumed that Naval Security Group Activity would continue its presence at Schoodic Point and so did not provide guidance for future use of the Navy buildings and lands.

Surrounded by park lands, the Navy property offers many opportunities for public access and resource management. Its historic buildings and other facilities have great potential to support Acadia's mission. However, new lands and programs require additional commitments of personnel and funds. Hard choices must be made. The new plan will outline these choices so that decision makers, in consultation with the public, can shape the future of the Schoodic unit. This plan will amend Acadia's General Management Plan which will otherwise remain in effect.



Environmental Concerns

★ The Navy and the State of Maine are making sure that environmental issues associated with transfer of the base to park use are addressed. NSGA Winter Harbor prides itself on its high standards for handling potentially hazardous materials and contaminants and has prepared an environmental assessment of its actions relating to closing of the base. This process, which must be completed before transfer of the property to the National Park Service, will address cleanup of problem areas such as buildings containing asbestos or lead paint.

★ The NPS is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to address future use of the Schoodic portion of the park. Issues identified for analysis include traffic, parking, and overall use levels for the park. Baseline information will be presented on natural resources as well as on the regional economy, so that alternative future uses can be compared.

An EIS looks at resources that may be affected by one or more of the actions in the alternatives. The NEPA process includes a harder look at these resources to determine if they really will be affected in more than a negligible way, as well as analysis to learn the extent and duration of the impact. The following resources may be affected: soils, air quality, water resources, land use, vegetation and wildlife, recreational resources, the visitor experience of solitude and quiet, marine resources, archeological resources, cultural landscapes, socioeconomics, energy use and conservation.

Opportunities & Goals

At the start of planning for the Schoodic unit, the NPS identified several guiding principles. Still in effect, they incorporate the overall Acadia National Park mission and also state that the Schoodic plan will be based on thorough study of the area's natural and cultural resources and the desire to maintain the current quiet, natural visitor experience enjoyed by users. NPS is committed to an open public process for decision making and to understanding and respecting the concerns of surrounding communities. It should be understood that the laws establishing Acadia National Park will limit the range of permissible uses at Schoodic.

Opportunities and goals for Schoodic are based on the studies and consultations conducted by the National Park Service as part of the planning process. The following goals were identified to focus discussion and analysis of proposed alternative courses of action.

Acadia National Park is fortunate to be part of a strong network of organizations and individuals dedicated to protecting the natural and cultural resources so integral to the quality of life in downeast Maine. We are asking our partners, which include educational institutions like the University of Maine and College of the Atlantic, research organizations and museums as well as advocacy groups like the Friends of Acadia, for their views of what the future Schoodic should be like. Other critical sources of ideas are the residents and local governments of neighboring communities.

Goals

- * Schoodic's natural, cultural, and scenic resources and associated values are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader ecosystems and cultural context.
 - * Preserve significant historic structures and cultural landscapes.
 - * Preserve and restore natural areas.
 - * Restore important scenic vistas.
 - * Assist Navy to protect archives.
- * Maintain the quiet, natural visitor experience now enjoyed by the public.
 - * Evaluate proposed new uses to ensure that traffic and noise are kept to a minimum.
 - * Develop desired carrying capacities for specific park areas (e.g. main base campus, Little Moose Island) and monitor cumulative impacts over time.
 - * Only allow low-impact recreation and manage to prevent resource degradation.
- * Use existing facilities to house a research and education center with programs, classrooms, laboratories and lodging for faculty and students of all ages.
 - * Work with partners to develop and operate center.
 - * Develop interpretive approaches for site history, including the Navy's use.
- * Existing buildings are retained if they can be reused in ways that are operationally efficient, sustainable, and supportive of the mission of Acadia National Park.
- * Reuse decisions are made in consultation with neighboring communities as certain proposed uses for the park may be more appropriately sited in town centers e.g. retirement housing, commercial lodging, retail stores.
- * Buildings and infrastructure necessary for maintenance and operation of the Schoodic unit are identified and strategies developed to retrofit them for park use.
 - * All facilities are universally accessible.

Alternatives

ACTION ALTERNATIVES AND "NO ACTION"

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that we identify and evaluate alternative approaches to meeting our goals. They will be refined during the scoping process. There will also be a "no action" alternative describing what would happen if no funding were provided to NPS for reuse of the Navy base and it had to be secured in an inactive state for an indefinite time period.

PROPOSALS COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

When the Navy property is transferred to the National Park Service in 2002, some aspects of the Schoodic unit will remain unchanged and some management actions proposed for the future will not vary from one "alternative" to another. The term for new actions which will not change under the alternative management approaches outlined below are "proposals common to all alternatives." Many of these proposals already have a broad degree of support from the public and will be further analyzed and discussed in the coming

months.

The NPS will continue to provide basic resource management, maintenance and interpretive services at Schoodic, expanding operations as funding permits. We also intend to keep the park scenic road open year round.

Under all alternatives, visitors would continue to enjoy an uncrowded park experience. Recreational facilities might not expand, but there would be increased interpretive and educational opportunities. We plan to expand interpretation at Schoodic to include the history of the Navy's presence there.

Also under all alternatives, the network of hiking trails connecting the Navy base to parklands around the perimeter of Big Moose Island would be opened to the public, and visitor information materials updated to reflect changes. Current informal or "social" trails, especially on Little Moose Island would be evaluated for potential resource damage and adjustments made if needed. The Schoodic unit would also be evaluated as part of the parkwide alternative transportation planning, to explore potential connections to the inter-

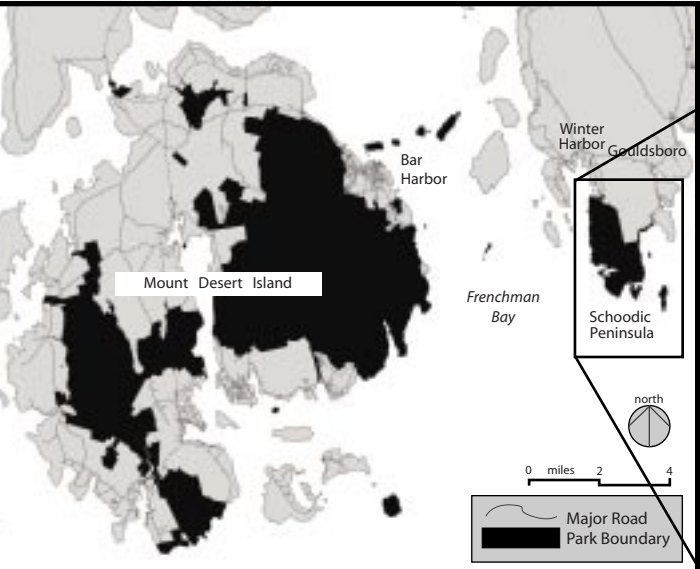
modal system which includes parking and shuttle buses. If feasible, water transportation might provide connections to Mount Desert Island.

The system of roads, paths, parking lots and open space would be reconfigured to create a more efficient and pleasant campus environment.

Park operations would be based at the current public works building, and would include offices, storage, garages, and a meeting room.

ALTERNATIVE 1: MULTI-PARTNER APPROACH

A highlight of this alternative is development of a research and education center at Schoodic which would offer a variety of programs for people of all ages in the fields of natural and cultural history, conservation, science, music, and art. Programs might include, for example, scientific research, environmental education, artists-



Acadia National Park



Existing Navy Base at Schoodic Point

in-residence, life-long learning, and university extension classes. Facilities would include housing, classroom and laboratory space as well as food service and recreational amenities. The center, a new organization co-sponsored by the National Park Service and other non-profit partner organizations, would use the facilities at Schoodic for activities consistent with the mission of Acadia National Park.

A strong and flexible nonprofit organization may be needed to develop and manage the new research and education center. NPS is providing seed money for the center through its national learning center program. Efforts will be made to

Significance of Schoodic

The National Park Service at Acadia National Park protects and conserves outstanding scenic, natural, and cultural resources for present and future generations. These resources include a glaciated coastal and island landscape, biological diversity, clean air and water, and a rich cultural heritage. Acadia National Park also offers opportunities for high-quality non-consumptive recreation, education and scientific research. The Schoodic portion

of the park exemplifies these resource values and is prized for its peaceful nature, outstanding scenic beauty, and high levels of species diversity.

Schoodic offers visitors exceptional views of the rocky coast and surrounding islands. It is a favored spot for surf watching and offers unobstructed views to the open ocean from its lightly traveled scenic road which ends at Schoodic Point. The summit of Schoodic Head is

another fine vantage point. The Schoodic unit contains four Maine Critical Areas, identified to protect marine invertebrates, nesting birds on Schoodic Island, rare plants on Little Moose Island and two stands of Jack Pine.

Schoodic contains significant cultural landscapes, sites of archeological interest, as well as the 1935 Rockefeller Building which has been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.



space. The historic Rockefeller building could provide exhibit space, housing, a small visitor center, and offices for the center and its partner organizations. The galley would continue to provide food service with its full-service kitchen and cafeteria. Other program

space could be located in the Schooner Club, a lodge with a kitchen, and several large rooms, and in the base chapel, gym and day care center. The center could provide housing for researchers and students in existing dormitories, camp sites and apartments.

A full range of revenue generating opportunities will be explored to support the center.

Some buildings would be removed if not suitable for adaptive reuse due to building condition or location. Sites cleared of structures would be restored to appropriate native plant communities. About 16 acres of disturbed landscape could

be restored under this alternative.

Accommodations would be available for up to 300 people in campsites, apartments, and dormitories. The center might have as many as 350 program users on site on a peak day. It is expected that overall, the Schoodic unit of the park would experience a moderate increase in visitor day use but have less overnight use than it did in 1999.

ALTERNATIVE 2: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE APPROACH

This concept represents the approach that would be taken if the National Park Service were to take most of the responsibility for developing a learning center that would be similar to but more modest than the center in alternative 1. Priority would be given to preserving historic structures and facilities necessary for park operations and programs. The learning center would be small and unlikely to fill all buildings available for reuse. Buildings not needed by the park would be offered for lease for compatible purposes, subject to market forces, or removed as funding permitted.

In this alternative the center would be located primarily in the historic Rockefeller building and adjacent dormitory, which would be reconfigured to house laboratories, classrooms, offices, and accommodations for students and researchers. The galley would remain for food service. A small exhibit area and visitor contact station would be located on the first floor of the Rockefeller building which could include a book sales operation and information about the site's history.

A number of buildings would be removed and about 40 acres of disturbed landscape could be restored to the appropriate native plant communities.

Accommodations would be available for up to 150 people in dormitories and apartments. The learning center might have as many as 200 program users on site on a peak day. It is expected that overall, the Schoodic unit of the park would experience a moderate increase in visitor day use but have much less overnight use than it did in 1999.

obtain commitments of funding and staff from partners to enhance and expand upon these initial commitments.

Most existing buildings would be retained, and those not needed for park or center purposes may be made available for lease for compatible uses. Tenants would be solicited on a competitive basis and revenues would be used to offset operational costs.

Center programs would be clustered in the middle of the current Navy base. Programs could be offered in the current commissary which would be reconfigured to house classrooms and laboratories along with an outdoor classroom, and some office